

## **Sissinghurst Castle Garden Access Statement**

Sissinghurst Castle Garden, Biddenden Road, Sissinghurst, TN17 2AB

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Sissinghurst Castle Garden is a garden in 450 acres of woods and farmland. The garden was created by Vita Sackville West and Harold Nicolson in the 1930's as a series of garden rooms within the ruins of an Elizabethan Manor.

### **Introduction**

1. The main visitor route including the car park, visitor reception, the shop, restaurant and entrance to the garden are on a slight slope.
2. There are steps and no handrails in the garden, maps are available at the garden entrance showing where steps are and advising step-free routes.
3. The vegetable garden and estate walks have rougher paths which can be less accessible during periods of poor weather.
4. Mobile phone reception is intermittent, ranging from strong to poor. In an emergency visitors can call 07885 230285 for the duty manager or approach any member of the staff and volunteer team. If you cannot get through, try calling the main office on 01580 710700.
5. There is Wi-fi available to visitors in the Old Dairy, Visitor Reception, Shop and the Granary Restaurant.
6. Dogs on leads are welcome on our estate however they are not allowed (apart from assistance dogs) in the Vegetable Garden, the formal Garden or any building. Cattle and sheep graze some of our land, there are signs advising walkers which are posted on the entrances to occupied fields.
7. There are unfenced bodies of water on the estate; two lakes on the wider estate and a moat on the perimeter of the garden.

### **Arrival & Parking Facilities**

1. There are three brown tourist signs on key junctions in the nearby vicinity of the property; the postcode of TN17 2AB will bring visitors using Sat Nav to the end of the drive where they will see two large brown signs directing visitors toward the estate.
2. There are 24 designated spaces for disabled visitors in the first section of the car park.
3. Disabled parking is approximately 150metres from Visitor Reception.
4. The surface of the car park, including the disabled parking area is a rough local ragstone mix.
5. The mobility buggy for visitors can stop at all of the main areas of interest (shops, catering, entrance to the garden, visitor reception) but it is not able to provide a tour service for the gardens themselves.
6. During the winter season (From November to mid-March) the mobility buggy is not operational. At this time, visitors may drop off passengers and return vehicles to the car park. If the buggy is not operational at other times, staff will advise visitors of this in the Car Park.
7. During busy times, the overflow car park (a field) may be used. Staff will try to reserve spaces nearest to the main visitor route for visitors with mobility needs.

## The Old Dairy

The Old Dairy is near the car park and is home to a small coffee shop, the second-hand bookshop, two toilets (one accessible) and the plant shop.

1. The old dairy coffee shop is approximately 100 metres from the disabled spaces in the car park.
2. Access into and through the Old Dairy is flat and it is well lit.
3. During good weather, the entrance door is left open; in poor weather the door is pulled shut and opens outward.
4. There is a wood burning stove in the Old Dairy which has a fire guard.
5. The Old Dairy has hearing loops at the tills.
6. The counter height in the Coffee Shop is 920mm and the height in the Plant Shop is 850mm.
7. Tables are not fixed to the floor. There is not circulation space between all the tables of 1200mm, tables with better accessibility are available in the Granary Restaurant.
8. Staff will assist visitors as required, visitors can be seated if they experience difficulty queuing and staff will carry food and trays as necessary. In this instance, visitors may find the Granary restaurant to be more suited to them as there are more tables reserved for our less able visitors.
9. Drinking straws are available.

## WCs

There is one main block of toilets at Sissinghurst but there are others at both catering facilities.

1. There are three accessible toilets at Sissinghurst; in the Old Dairy Coffee Shop (right transfer), outside Visitor Reception (left transfer) and near the Granary Restaurant and Gift Shop (right transfer).
2. There is an alarm in the accessible toilets near Visitor Reception which can be re-set if pulled accidentally.
3. There is not a Changing Places facility at Sissinghurst.
4. The accessible toilets at Sissinghurst are lit with central lights and have automatic hand dryers.

## Visitor Reception

This is where visitors can sign up for membership to the Trust and get their entrance tokens for the gardens and exhibitions.

1. The floor in visitor reception is carpeted.
2. There is a very slight gradient to enter visitor reception but no steps.
3. The door is 1.55 metres wide.
4. The entrance door to visitor reception is manual and opens into the building. During warm weather, the doors are held open. Staff and volunteers are always on hand to help with opening these doors.
5. The desk in visitor reception is 850mm high. The room is open plan and staff can move to speak to visitors at tables provided.
6. Visitor reception has a central ceiling light and natural light from windows and skylights.
7. There are chairs available for visitors to sit if needed, one chair has armrests.

8. There is one induction loop at the till in visitor reception.
9. There is a tablet in Visitor Reception on which visitors can view photos of places at Sissinghurst that may be inaccessible to some such as The South Cottage or the top of the Tower.
10. There are six manual wheelchairs available from Visitor Reception, it is not always necessary to book but it is advisable to ring ahead to book one from May – August.

## The Vegetable Garden

The vegetable garden is set over four acres and has grass paths which can be muddy in poor weather. The entrance to the garden is signposted and marked on welcome maps available in Visitor Reception.

## Oast House

The Oast is used for changing exhibitions throughout the year.

1. The entrance to the Oast is approximately 150 metres from the disabled area of the car park.
2. The path surface outside the Oast is tarmac.
3. There are 11 steps, with a handrail to get up to the exhibition space in the Oast House. There is no lift.
4. The mainly glass door into the Oast is heavy as it's on a soft close hinge.
5. While it is dependent on the exhibition in the Oast (which changes regularly) the building can have an echo.
6. The Oast has overhead lights and natural light from windows.
7. There are seats for visitors to use in the Oast.
8. Depending on the exhibition, the Oast may not be manned. Visitor Reception is very close should a visitor need assistance.

## The Granary Restaurant

The Granary Restaurant is a larger catering facility than that available in the Old Dairy with a more extensive menu.

1. The Granary is approximately 200 metres from the disabled area of the car park.
2. Access into and through the Granary is flat and the building is well lit.
3. During good weather, the entrance door is left open; in poor weather the door pulled shut and opens in both directions
4. The Granary has a hearing loop at the till.
5. The counter height is 970mm.
6. Staff will assist visitors as required, visitors can be seated if they experience difficulty queuing.
7. There is circulation space between the tables of around 1200mm.
8. Menus are available on a large print but not on braille currently and staff will assist in describing the menu.
9. Drinking straws are available for visitors to use.

## Garden

The garden is the main attraction at Sissinghurst; it is a series of garden 'rooms' with different colours and seasonal themes.

1. The entrance to the garden is approximately 200metres from the car park.

2. Maps are available at the garden entrance to show steps and wheelchair accessible routes in the garden. Paths are narrow and it is important to keep to the suggested routes for both safety and conservation reasons. There are some areas of the garden that are not wheelchair accessible, however most areas can be viewed from other areas.
3. Paths in the garden vary. They include; grass, stone and brick. They have many changes in levels and some steps are not highly visible
4. The garden is quite flat; there is one small incline in the Orchard. This is not on the advised wheelchair route.
5. There are steps in the garden, some are very shallow and are marked on the map advising that they may be appropriate for visitors who walk with a stick.
6. The steps in the garden do not have handrails
7. There are no hearing loops in the garden or buildings past the garden entrance.
8. There are no toilet facilities in the garden or buildings past the garden entrance.
9. There is only one gate in the wheelchair accessible route around the garden which does require a key. Visitors with a wheelchair will be given this with their map on entering the garden, keys should be returned to Visitor Reception.
10. There are benches or seats in most of the garden rooms; 2 benches in the Top Courtyard, 2 benches in the Rose Garden, 1 seat in the Herb Garden, 3 benches in the Orchard, 2 benches in the White Garden and 1 seat in Delos.
11. The garden in total is approximately 6 acres in size.
12. There is a deep moat on two sides of the garden and a pond in the garden, both of which are unfenced and do not have signage. These are clearly marked on the visitor map

## Library

The library is a showroom within the garden.

1. The path outside the library is stone, inside the room has a wooden floor with rugs (secured with rug grip).
2. There are two steps, 120mm high to get into the library. The door width is 1400mm. There is no ramp for access into the library. Once in the room there are no further steps and there is enough room to turn a wheelchair.
3. While the library is open to visitors the door is left open.
4. The light levels in the library vary on the natural light levels; there are some interior wall mounted lights but no central ceiling light.
5. Visitors are welcome to sit on either hard chairs or the sofas in the library.
6. There is always a volunteer in the library.
7. Braille and large print guides are available on request at Visitor Reception.
8. Our indoor spaces are not accessible for powered wheelchairs or mobility scooters.

## Tower

The Tower has four floors including the roof. On the first floor visitors can look into a show room and on the second and third floors there are changing exhibitions. Visitors can also view from the roof level.

1. The Tower sits within the garden and has 78 steps around a spiral staircase to reach the top. The door out onto the roof is 1350mm by 580mm. There is both a central rope and a wooden handrail for visitors to use. There is only one staircase which serves all floors however there are passing points at the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors. There are seats on the second and third floors for visitors to use.

2. There is usually a volunteer on hand, either on the second floor or at the bottom of the Tower.
3. The Tower is mostly lit by natural light but there are lights on the landings of the spiral stairs.

## The South Cottage

The South Cottage is a building which sits in the main gardens, it has four show rooms and access is usually by timed group entry. There are many changes in level in The South Cottage which make the building inaccessible for less able visitors.

1. There is a flat route to the South Cottage through the garden but one step (150mm in depth) to get into the building, the door into South Cottage requires a latch to be lifted to open.
2. There are many changes of levels in South Cottage and no handrails.
3. The floor surfaces in South Cottage are brick, wooden floor boards with rugs, and carpet.
4. For conservation reasons, many indoor areas at Sissinghurst do not have bright lights installed and the light levels depend on natural light and lamps. In South Cottage the kitchen and upstairs have the most natural light, all rooms have lamps, and in the hallway and kitchen light is supplemented with ceiling lights.
5. There are seats for visitors to use in all buildings.
6. Access to South Cottage is by timed ticket, a volunteer is with groups at all times.

## The Gift Shop

The gift shop is larger than the plant shop in the Old Dairy and offers a different selection of goods.

1. The gift shop is approximately 200 metres from the disabled area of the car park.
2. Access into the gift shop is flat; however there are three shallow (100mm deep) steps with a handrail on both sides to access the lower level.
3. The gift shop door is light and opens both directions. Double doors can be opened to help with access.
4. The gift shop has a hearing loop at the till and the room is very well lit.
5. The counter height is 940mm, there is a ledge of 760mm in front of the main counter.
6. There is space to turn a wheelchair
7. Staff and volunteers will assist visitors reaching items to view if they cannot be reached
8. There is not a large print version of the price, however staff will assist with telling visitors the price of items

## Wider Estate

There is over 400 acres of wood and farmland to explore at Sissinghurst, these include streams, lakes and scrapes which are not fenced and signed. Paths can be very muddy in poor weather, maps are available at Visitor Reception and there are post markers on the route.

## Contact details for more information

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